

Administrative and Instructional Alternatives to Education
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It all began late one afternoon in October, 1969 when a group of educators from the colleges and local school districts in the Educational Consortium met to discuss basic problems and formulate a comprehensive plan of action. Suddenly John said, "Why in the hell don't we get better results?" His frustrations emanated from long experiences with new programs which had great promise but produced little results and even less change.

John's statement initiated a brainstorming session from which these ideas evolved.

1. There is a lack of communication between the principal and teachers and between the principal and central administration.
2. Teachers don't want to change.
3. Every situation is unique and different.
4. There must be more team work.
5. Colleges don't train teachers realistically.
6. Human interaction skills must be improved.
7. Programs that are good seem to depend upon the director and seldom last if the director leaves.
8. There must be a more effective in-service education program.
9. There must be greater accountability.
10. Too many programs are adopted without any basic understanding or preparation.
11. Colleges and public schools need to work together better.
12. Central administration doesn't understand the principal's job.
13. Principals are bound by too many rules and regulations that aren't needed or that don't work.
14. There needs to be a re-examination of the objectives and roles of the educator.
15. Too many administrators and teachers are satisfied with a status quo situation or else they are afraid to change.
16. Too many administrators lack the skills and 'know how' for changing things.

Following the meeting an idea germinated. Why not take the best theory and practice available and fuse them into a program for developing teachers who can really facilitate learning? The more the idea was discussed the better it sounded. Pulling together the research, theory, and techniques was quite a task, but selling the idea to the University, local school districts and building principals was formidable. The plan, which later became known as "The Teacher Development Program" involved a reconceptualization of the role of the college and school districts. Finally approval was obtained from Texas Southern University and 14 local school districts to go ahead with the program. Dr. Strong, from Texas Southern University was given the task of developing and guiding the instructional team that was to work with the administrators and teachers in the 14 participating school districts. Funds for the project were obtained from the U.S. Office of Education to develop and conduct the program.

During the ensuing three years the instructional team worked closely with the principals and teachers in developing and guiding all phases of the program. It was a true team effort in which the local school districts and the university combined their resources and talents to develop and test a new concept and program for developing professional personnel and improving the instructional programs for all students.

The team decided that the major thrust of the Teacher Development Program would be to develop and test a new educational concept and to train educational teams to serve as resource persons who could establish and operate teacher learning centers or programs for other teachers within their building or their district. The basic objectives for the program were developed through a series of mini-institutes. Administrators, board members, community persons, college personnel, state agency personnel and teachers worked together to determine what they felt were the kinds of skills, attitudes and knowledge that teachers needed to make them more proficient - especially in working with minority students and individualizing instructions and programs.

When the plans were finalized it became clear that the success or failure of such a program would rest upon the building principals involved. They, as in most educational programs, are the catalyst and moving force that make a program go. So a call was sent out to the principals to see if they were interested in participating in such a program. Some doubt existed because of what was being asked of the principals. They were being asked to permit the teachers involved in the program to have the freedom to determine the educational need of each child and be to able to use whatever material or strategy she felt most appropriate. In addition they had to agree to furnish, to the best of their ability, the resources the teacher needed. They also had to serve as a team member in the Teacher Development Program. However, our fears were soon eliminated as the principals responded like the true professionals they were. Seventy-eight schools were involved during the three year tenure of the program.

The scope of this discussion will be limited to the elementary principal, although junior and senior high principals were involved in the program. It should be noted that the superintendents and their staffs had been involved in the program from the beginning and had given their permission and support to the program.

In a series of meetings with the principals the following points were developed and became basic conceptual and operational elements of the program.

1. Teachers must be allowed to determine the educational needs of each child in their class.
2. Teachers must have the freedom to use whatever time, material, resources or strategies they feel are the most appropriate for the learner.
3. Teachers must accept accountability for their decisions and actions.
4. Principals must provide, to the best of their-ability, the resources requested by the teachers.
5. Principals must evaluate teachers on the basis of the achievement of pupils and procedures used by the teacher. Pupil achievement means the obtainment of the objectives established for the individual.

Needless to say, there was considerable apprehension on the part of many of the principals. After all this was not congruent with their perceived role. Many felt that teachers simply could not do or would not

do the things demanded. They were right, because our studies had shown that less than 10 per cent of the teachers had the diagnostic skills to individually determine the precise reading needs of a learner. But, the purpose of the Program was to develop these persons into competent professionals who could do the diagnostic and prescriptive tanks demanded in an individualized instructional program. Another fear expressed by the principals was the lack of control and fear of parental reaction. Neither of these fears materialized. In fact, just the contrary occurred. Once teachers were given the freedom to make decisions and the supportive services were provided the success or failure of the students became the responsibility of the teacher. In the past a teacher could always blame failure upon the system, the lack of co-operation or someone else, but now it was her/his responsibility - or in other words, the teacher's to do or not to do. Only one situation involving a problem with parents occurred during the three years. In one school there was a set of twins in the second grade. One was assigned to a teacher in the Teacher Development Program and the other one to the control class. At the beginning of the year they were both reading at the second grade level, but by the middle of the year the first child was reading at almost the fourth grade level and. loving school while the one in the control group was still at the second grade level and was exhibiting no love for school. The mother of the twins did considerable voluntary work in the school and was a community leader. She asked the principal why both teachers couldn't use the techniques used by the Teacher Development Program teacher. Instead of the principal pointing out that the purpose of the program was to test the new method and to develop persons to train the other teachers if it proved successful, the principal felt threatened and became defensive. She interpreted the mother's questions as a criticism of her ability as a principal. The principal informed the parent and then the participating teacher that the program would not be continued in that school the following year. By this time the teacher, who had been in the district for about 15 years and the parent were so convinced of the merits of the program that the following events occurred. The teacher told the principal that she would not go back to the old traditional way and if forced to do so she would ask for a transfer to another school. The parent began to muster up community pressures and was determined to take the matter to the school board. Fortunately the director was able to intervene and help the principal realize that it was not a threat but that the parents were expressing their approval and desire for the innovative and successful approach to learning that was being used.

There is no question but that there is an inherent danger when one changes a mode of operation or grants freedom but the principals in this program found this to be more imagined than real. Take the matter of control of the personnel. Instead of loss of control the principals found that for the first time they could begin to hold teachers accountable for doing a professional job. In the past the principal's control depended upon directives and demands which usually lacked a rational base. Very few of the principals had established specific minimum levels of performance expected or had clearly delineated areas of authority and responsibility. Lacking the ability to pinpoint what was to be done and who was responsible for doing it the principals found it difficult to support their actions when seriously challenged. The principals in general were forced to make evaluative judgments upon behaviors that most often times had little direct bearing upon the prime function of the program - what was happening to boys and girls. In their new role of facilitator, they found that they could shift the responsibility of educational decisions for individual learners to the teacher. In this way they could now hold teachers responsible for what they did in the instructional process. The teacher was the one who had the

information about the learner and who was in the best position to decide what should be done. Therefore, she had to make these decisions and then see that they were implemented. This enabled the principal to have a constant check on what was happening and how it was occurring. For example, he might randomly select a student and ask the teacher to give him a report on his reading development. If the teacher had done her job she could give him a specific analysis of where the student was at that time and show the principal the next objective for the student. In addition the teacher must be able to verify her statements with diagnostic and operational data. The principal then had several alternatives. He could elect to accept the teacher's report or he could check the accuracy by verifying the diagnostic data and technique. If he was satisfied with the validity of the data he could go along with the procedures the teacher had selected for the student or he could suggest some alternative strategy. Whichever course he pursued it was important to remember that the particular strategy must be evaluated in terms of the objectives for which it was designed.

At every point the principal had greater control over the situation than he had ever had before, but he also had to accept the responsibility for the success or failure if he insisted upon making all of the decisions. In general most of the principals left those decisions up to the teacher as they soon realized they had neither the time nor the expertise needed for this type of instructional program.

Principals in the program began to find their roles had-changed. Now they were busy trying to provide the supportive services the teachers felt they needed and working with their staff to develop realistic goals for their students. Over all goals that had been so common were found to be unrealistic for too many of the students so new goals had to be developed. Teachers suddenly began to realize that their training and expertise was inadequate to do their job so the principal found himself more as a developer of people. If they needed specialized training then it was his job to see that they got it. In most cases it didn't demand additional costs or resources but simply a more effective use of the resources that were available. The principal's role had become one of a facilitator. As a facilitator he spent more time with the staff in (1) developing and clarifying objectives; (2) manipulating and co-coordinating resources to enable the teachers to function more effectively, and (3) in evaluating the progress of the school in obtaining its objectives.

Another change that was detected was a more analytical and philosophical look at his role and job. Questions such as the following were being asked by many of the principals. Why are we teaching these concepts and using these materials? How are we teaching? What is the impact of our program on the child as a human being? Is there a better way to do it? What effects will my decisions have upon my staff, my students, or my community?

These changes did not just occur. It was a part of the program's strategy to try to bring about change in all levels of personnel- college instructors, principals, and teachers. This was done through constant interaction and working together with the Teacher Development instructional team towards developing and achieving common goals. Past experience had shown us that basic change in the behavior of an individual was a slow and difficult process. It is like trying to change the bend of a giant oak tree. If enough force is applied at once to bend the tree it most likely will break, but if a constant force is applied over a long period of time the tree will eventually bend in the direction of the force. Unfortunately, the design of the program put the

major thrust and effort towards improving and changing teachers. However, the achieved change in many of the principals and in most of the teachers involved in the program indicated a real potential for this type of cooperative educational program to effectuate real and long term change in the education process.

An analysis of the program in 59 schools where control and experimental classes could be established revealed the following findings.

1. Students at all grade levels (1-8) showed superior achievement when compared with control groups.
2. The program worked equally well for students from different racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups.
3. The program worked in schools in the inner city, suburbs and small towns.
4. The effectiveness of the program and teachers greatly depended upon the role the principal accepted. This is especially true in terms of long range effects.
5. The attitude of teachers can be changed regardless of age or years of experience. Since a re-conceptualization of role by the teachers was imperative to the success of the program a definite plan was implemented to bring about change. To determine if this change could be achieved it was decided to use clinical observation and the Torrance Test of Creativity. This test was selected since it measures a person's fluency, flexibility and originality in thinking. The difference in the pre and post test scores of the teachers in the program tested were: 7 standard scores (s.s.) for fluency, 14 s.s. for flexibility and 32 s.s. for originality. These findings were substantiated by the clinical team's observation and rating. The team's psychologist was responsible for many of the specific techniques used in developing this change but it was felt that by restructuring the teacher's concept of herself and of her role that the other changes were bound to follow.
6. Teachers and principals involved in the Program liked it and felt it had much to offer towards improving education.
7. Not all principals and teachers can or will adjust to this type of program.
8. The program offers a viable administrative alternative to principals.

From that afternoon in October, 1969, a concept of an alternative administrative and educational program has been conceived, developed and tested. It has been found to offer a viable alternative to the traditional approaches of training educational personnel and administering schools.

Experiences and the data both indicate that this program for training educational personnel and the method of administering a school are economically feasible. In addition there is strong evidence that this approach to educational management will produce superior academic achievement as well as improve the attitude of all involved. The stress of such a program is on the development of people, which is where it should be.

Additional information on education and teacher development may be found on Strong's Web site: <http://strongoneducation.com/>